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ABSTRACT

This document discusses state initiatives to address the dropout problem by presenting an overview of programmatic strategies states are using to meet the needs of dropout-prone youth and school dropouts and strategies to finance these efforts. It provides a framework for understanding current state programs and then presents an overview of current programs. A section on funding of current state dropout prevention programs distinguishes state dropout prevention and recovery programs on the dimensions of general program strategies, grants strategies and funding mechanisms, and program services. It distinguishes three basic programs and funding strategies: grants for demonstration programs or model programs, grants for research and dissemination, and grants for regular programs. Dropout services provided by state programs are classified as focusing on academic improvement, attendance improvement, personal and social adjustment, and career preparation and job training. The remainder of the report summarizes key features of several state dropout programs currently being conducted in California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, and Washington. Other state programs designed by Alaska, Minnesota, and New Jersey to meet the needs of high-risk youth and prevent them from dropping out are briefly reviewed. Planned programs in Connecticut and Oregon are also discussed. (NB)

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DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

State Programs in Dropout Prevention

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STATE INITIATIVES IN DROPOUT PREVENTION

During the last few years, dropout prevention and recovery has been at the forefront of attention of state policymakers. The efforts of a number of states, including New York, California, Florida, and North Carolina, are particularly well-known, since some of these initiatives have been funded at relatively high levels. However, several other states are either supporting dropout prevention initiatives (in some cases, they are not specifically called by that name) or are now in the process of planning and developing programs. Others have established state policies to encourage local school districts to develop such programs. Moreover, even in states where the dropout issue appears to be dormant, bills providing for prevention or recovery programs have often been introduced into the legislature, although to date these efforts have met with little success. In sum, the landscape of state dropout prevention runs the gamut from inactive to fairly intense. In the discussion below, we first provide a framework for understanding current state programs and then present an overview of current programs.

Funding of Current State Dropout Prevention Programs

State dropout prevention and recovery programs can be distinguished on a number of key dimensions. These include General Program Strategies, Grants Strategies and Funding Mechanisms, and Program Services. Each of these elements is present in the state programs that are described later in the section.

General Program Strategies

State programs now in operation reflect a number of different strategies for meeting the needs of dropout-prone youth and school

dropouts. We distinguish here three basic program and funding strategies. These are: 1) Grants for Demonstration Programs or Model Programs; 2) Grants for Research and Dissemination; and 3) Grants for Regular Programs.

Demonstration or model program grants are currently being used exclusively by states to fund dropout prevention activities where resources are relatively scarce and where the state is either unwilling or unable to provide extensive program funding. In states where this strategy has been used, the state has generally awarded funds through a grants competition, under which proposals using different models for serving dropout-prone youth were solicited. In some of these programs, e.g., in New York and California, only districts with certain characteristics, e.g., low attendance rates, were eligible to submit proposals under the competition; in other states, e.g., Massachusetts, all districts were eligible for funding, but preference was given to districts with high levels of student need. In some states, the demonstration was limited to models for serving youth at a particular age level, e.g., middle school students in Florida and lower elementary school students in Colorado; in others, the local program could serve dropout-prone youth at all levels of the system, but they had to employ different strategies and methods of dropout prevention.

A second strategy of state dropout prevention programs is based on research and dissemination. The premise of this strategy is that we can draw on existing research and practice to identify successful or "effective" practices for serving dropout-prone youth and disseminate such practices to districts and schools with similar types of students. States using this approach are funding research and dissemination activities in

two ways. One is an in-house strategy used in California: additional funding is provided to a special unit in the state education department to identify model programs and provide information about them to school districts around the state. The second is a strategy of grants to institutions of higher education to evaluate demonstration or model programs and disseminate information about them statewide. This strategy is being used by Florida in conjunction with a strategy of demonstration grants to fund model dropout prevention programs.

The demonstration grants strategy and the research and dissemination strategy have both been criticized as "cosmetic" solutions to the dropout problem. Both create the impression that the state is taking actions to deal with the problem, but neither really contains the resources that are required to address it effectively. Others suggest, however, that these strategies are legitimate responses to the problem. Since the research literature does not provide any definitive answers about "what works" in dropout prevention, and since resources are relatively scarce, experimentation with different program models is an appropriate way to deal with the dropout problem before large-scale funding is undertaken.

Where resources in states have been more abundant, states have gone beyond funding of model or demonstration projects and have used a strategy of funding regular program grants to support dropout prevention activities. Often the grants process has involved at least two stages. In the first stage, the state has supported planning grants to assist school officials develop a program, determine its staffing and resource requirements, and put into place the resources and materials to implement the program on a full scale. The planning grants were generally funded at relatively low levels since services were not generally provided by

grantees at this stage of the grants cycle. Following on the planning grant was an implementation grant to carry out the plans that were developed previously. In most state programs, all recipients of planning grants received full-scale implementation grants in the second funding cycle. However, where funding is constrained, states often limit the award of implementation grants only to districts or schools with the most promising program strategies.

Grants Strategies and Funding Mechanisms

States are currently using a variety of mechanisms to fund dropout prevention programs. It should be apparent, however, from the above discussion that the principal mechanism for funding programs is the categorical grant which specifically earmarks funds for dropout prevention activities. In some states, e.g., Massachusetts, these are competitive grants in which all school districts may submit proposals, but where preference is given to school districts with particular characteristics. In others, such as New York, they are targeted grants; only school districts with a high incidence of dropout-prone youth can submit proposals under the competition.

In most of the discretionary grants programs, funds are distributed by the state based on budgeted or anticipated program costs. Districts or schools submit budgets with their proposals that estimate the costs of providing the proposed services for a particular number of students. Although total program costs divided by the number students in the program will generate unit costs, discretionary grants are generally funded based on total program costs, rather than unit costs. States can, however, and frequently do fund categorical programs based on unit costs -- but usually not for demonstration or model programs. Categorical funding for

educationally-disadvantaged students, for example, is frequently based on the number of students to be served multiplied by a cost per student. Since these programs have been in operation for some period of time, states have been able to estimate the cost of the extra services they provide and use this as the basis for recurring program funding.

Although the categorical grant based on competitive or targeted funding is the most prevalent method of funding dropout prevention programs, at least one state, North Carolina, is funding dropout prevention programs through its basic school aid formula. As a state where a relatively large number of school districts have high dropout rates, dropout prevention is viewed as part of the state's overall responsibility to provide a basic education to all children. An additional amount of money is therefore included in each district's funding requirements, which are then provided through a combination of state and local dollars.

This funding mechanism more closely approximates the unit-based approach to funding discussed above under categorical programs. A dollar amount per pupil multiplied by the number of pupils to be served is included in a school district's basic program requirements. The difference between general and categorical funding, however, is that where funding is provided under the general aid formula, program funds are usually generated through a combination of state and local revenues, rather than from state funds exclusively.

In addition to categorical grants and general formula aid, some states use a cost-reimbursement strategy to fund dropout programs. Rather than providing funding for districts based on anticipated or standard

costs, programs are reimbursed for costs previously incurred. This strategy is used by Washington State to fund educational clinics for school dropouts. Clinics provide instructional services and get reimbursed for them based on the number of hours of instruction and the pupil/teacher ratio in each class. This funding strategy forces clinics to determine the best mix of pupils and teachers in each class so that they can recover the costs they incur in operating the program.

Program Services

States are currently using dropout prevention funds to provide a broad range of services for dropout-prone youth and school dropouts. This broad range of services can be grouped into four generic areas: 1) academic improvement; 2) attendance improvement; 3) personal and social adjustment; and 4) career preparation and job training.

In the academic area, the goal of dropout prevention is pursued through a variety of interventions: alternative schools or classes, alternative curricula and instructional techniques, and extracurricular activities. Attendance improvement programs involve more contact and follow-up with parents, rewards for attendance, and better recordkeeping -- frequently a computerized attendance system. Personal adjustment programs involve individual or group counseling, family counseling, the use of mentors or buddie, and frequently, collaborative relationships with social service agencies to provide services to students. Finally, career preparation and job training programs include career counseling and seminars on employability, interships with community service agencies or private employers, modified scheduling to permit after-school employment, and, in some cases, guaranteed employment upon completion of the program or a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Major Programs

Several states have received a great deal of attention for their support of dropout prevention and recovery programs. To provide a better perspective on current state dropout activities, we summarize below the key features of several state programs.

California

The state passed a major five-year dropout initiative in October 1985 under Senate Bill 65 (SB65) to assist school districts improve their abilities to keep youth in school. In addition to increasing school districts' flexibility to use other categorical aid to develop comprehensive long-range programs to meet the needs of high-risk youth, SB65 contained three major dropout prevention components.

- Motivation and Maintenance Grants are designed to help schools develop plans to overcome the problems faced by "high-risk" youth. In the first cycle, 1985-86, approximately 200 schools -- 50 school complexes of four schools each -- received $2 million in planning grants under the program. High schools received grants of $6,000; middle schools and elementary schools received grants of $4,000 each. In the second stage, $8 million is allocated for implementation grants to have outreach consultants assist schools implement these plans and an additional $2 million is allocated for a second cycle of planning grants.

- Alternative Education and Work Center Grants are targeted grants to districts with high dropout rates. Their purpose is to: 1) teach basic academic skills; 2) operate a diagnostic center to determine the pupils' needs; and 3) provide a combination of on-the-job training, counseling, and placement services. Union high school districts received planning grants of $8,000 in 1985-86 and an additional 50 districts are receiving grants in 1986-87.

- Educational Clinics are designed to assist school dropouts improve their basic academic skills sufficiently to return to an educational program and obtain a diploma or its equivalent. In 1986-87, $2 million was provided to nine public and private entities in the form of reimbursements for diagnostic assessments and up to 225 hours of instruction to enrolled students.

- Other features of SB65 are a model program repository which collects information on intervention strategies to improve the academic performance of at-risk youth, increase pupil attendance and establish a positive school climate and safer schools.

Colorado

The state is currently funding two dropout initiatives. In 1985, the Educational Quality Act included dropout prevention as part of the reform package. The 2 + 2 Dropout Prevention Program is undertaking a three-pronged attack on the dropout problem. A select number of districts are receiving funding under demonstration grants to pilot projects that have promise for reducing the dropout rate. These projects are concentrating largely on early intervention and prevention programs for young children. These include home/school liaison people working with families of elementary children, summer programs, mentorships in cooperation with local businesses, attendance projects, and parent support programs. During the last two years, Colorado has spent about $480,000 on nine pilot projects around the state.

Since July 1986, Colorado has also been providing funding for the Second Chance Pilot Program for youth age 16 to 21 who have dropped out of high school. The program is designed to provide students who have not completed a high school diploma or an equivalent certificate with the opportunity to complete the requirements for them. Public schools that are located in or contiguous to school districts with a dropout rate above the statewide average or that offer vocational, technical, or adult education programs are eligible to operate Second Chance programs. Districts operating the program receive funding under the state's general aid formula based on the number of students in the program and the authorized revenue base in the student's district of residence. The

operating district receives either 85 percent of the state funds that the home district would receive for the student or the cost of the program, whichever is less. The student's home district receives 10 percent of state funds and the state retains five percent of the funding for administration.

Florida

In 1984 Florida established the Model School Adjustment Program to develop and evaluate research-based model dropout prevention programs for students in grades 4 to 8 who were likely to become academic underachievers, failures, truants, dropouts or to manifest severe behavioral problems. Since its inception in 1985, the state has used a grants competition to award funds to school districts. In 1984-85, five grants totaling $322 thousand were awarded, with grants ranging in amount from $37,500 to $87,000; a research and validation grant of $53,000 was also awarded to Florida Atlantic University to identify variables present in middle school years which are predictive of failure or disruption in education. In 1985-86, ten grants totaling $976,600 were awarded, along with a research and validation grant of $99,700. The programs use a variety of strategies to meet the academic and behavioral needs of high-risk students.

Beginning in 1986-87, Florida is also requiring that all school districts establish a remediation program under which qualified school personnel shall meet with and counsel students identified as potential dropouts and, where possible, the parents or guardians of such students, to attempt to alleviate the conditions and problems that contributed to the identification of these students as potential dropouts.

Massachusetts

In 1985 the Massachusetts legislature passed is currently Chapter 188 of the Massachusetts School Improvement Act to provide discretionary grants to school districts for dropout prevention. Funds are awarded as competitive grants to individual school districts to develop supplementary efforts for grades 7 - 12. Preference is given to districts with high concentrations of students from low-income families and documented high dropout rates for the most recent three years. As of October 1986, 49 planning and implementation grants totalling $1.55 million were awarded, with an additional $1.37 million available for distribution from November 1986 to June 1987. Programs implemented under the grant included: remedial and tutorial programs; counseling programs; work study and cooperative education; programs for parents and community groups; pregnant and parenting teenager programs; and professional development for school personnel.

New York

In 1984 the New York State Legislature adopted a program, the Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention (AI/DP) Program. Under the program, school districts at or below the 10th percentile in attendance were required to submit a corrective plan to the Commissioner of Education. The plans had to include methods of identifying at-risk students in the 8th grade and specific actions to increase attendance and retention rates. For the 1984-85 school year, the legislature appropriated $28 million for discretionary grants -- $22.4 million for New York City and $4.8 million for grants to 68 upstate districts that ranged in size from $3,000 to $528,000. In New York City's community school districts and in upstate districts, program funds were used most

frequently to increase counseling time for students, to increase the number of referrals to outside agencies and to increase parent contact.

For 1985-86, the law and regulations for the AI/DP were changed to require that school districts target funds for programs to school buildings with a truancy rate above the median for the school district and provide services to middle school students. New York City received $21.6 million to serve 27,450 students; 67 upstate districts received $5.3 million to serve 79,000 students. As in the previous year, increased student counseling was the service most frequently provided to students.

North Carolina

In 1985 the North Carolina General Assembly established the state dropout prevention fund as part of its Basic Educational Program, the state's general aid formula. The State Board of Education subsequently developed a set of policies and procedures that specified the types of programs and activities that these programs could be used for. These included: in-school suspensions; counseling for high-risk students; extended school day programs; job placement specialists; school-to-work transition programs; and other special programs for high-risk students such as alternative schools and schools-within-schools. During Fiscal Year 1985 the legislature appropriated $15 million for distribution through the formula to the state's 141 school districts during the 1985-86 school year. Over half the funds were used for in-school suspension programs and another fourth of the funds were used for high-risk counseling. An additional $7 million from other funding sources brought funding for dropout programs to nearly $22 million.

Washington

In 1977 Washington established the educational clinics program. The educational clinics operate under contract with the Office of Public Instruction and provide short-term educational intervention services to students aged 13 - 19 who have dropped out of the public school system for at least one month or who have been expelled from school. The goals of the clinics are to enable the dropouts to reenter school, pass the GED test, or gain employment. The clinics are funded through reimbursements by the state for an initial diagnostic test for each entering student, for 75 days of instruction, and for an additional 60 days of instruction based on documentation of special needs.

The key components of the educational clinics are: 1) diagnosis of each student's educational abilities; and 2) an individualized, short-term, specialized program based on the diagnosis that aims to improve basic skills, improve motivation, and provide an employment orientation through instruction and experience in applying for and interviewing for jobs.

Washington is also currently funding a discretionary grants program called the "High Motivation School Retention Program" at a level of $600,000 per year. During 1984-85, 13 model programs received funding and an additional 11 programs were started 1985-86. Individual programs can receive a maximum of $25,000.

Other State Programs

Although programs specifically designated as "dropout prevention" have received the greatest attention, several states are also providing other special programs to meet the needs of high-risk youth and prevent them from dropping out. Alaska, for example, funds several programs,

including peer tutoring, community education and alternative high schools that offer non-traditional routes to high school completion; Minnesota funds over 100 dropout prevention programs throughout the state. New Jersey also funds several programs for at-risk youth, although again they are not usually defined as dropout prevention programs. State-funded programs include: family life education; alternative education; career/vocational education; adult education dropout centers; GED programs; and a grant program to reduce student disruption in schools. The grant program is a $1 million initiative to develop six model programs in 17 districts. These model programs are intended to: remove disruptive students and thus improve school environments; provide effective educational alternatives for disruptive students; identify successful elements of model programs for replication statewide; and establish a network for training and sharing information across the state.

Planned Programs

A number of states are currently at the stage of planning and developing new dropout prevention programs. Some are at the more formative phase of the planning process, while others are at the point where task forces or committees are nearly ready to submit proposals to the legislature. These planning efforts frequently involve the following components: 1) a review of available research on successful dropout prevention programs -- both within the state and in other states; 2) efforts to standardize the definition of "dropouts" and improve the procedures for collecting data on dropout-prone students and school dropouts; 3) a focus on early prevention and more comprehensive strategies to serve at-risk youth; and 4) a focus on strategies to improve school

climate and provide better monitoring of student attendance. The planning activities of two states, Connecticut and Oregon, reflect the breadth of concern with the dropout problem nationwide.

Connecticut

The State Board of Education in Connecticut has proposed a $2 million grant program to the legislature to provide funds for dropout prevention in 1987-88. The 25 school districts with the highest attrition rates would be eligible for grants of between $25,000 and $200,000. Each district would be required to submit a program proposal; funds would then cover the needs assessment plan, implementation, and evaluation. The state department of education would provide resource materials and information about successful dropout prevention programs to local school districts. Some of the major components of the state board's proposal include: a focus on national and statewide research efforts to affect systemic change rather than short-term change; a concern with early childhood; and attempts to improve data on dropout counts.

Oregon

In early 1987 Oregon was in the process of developing a three-year plan to address the dropout problem. The plan is based on a preventative early intervention strategy. Beginning with the 1986-87 school year, the state will create a status report on current dropout prevention activity, develop and field-test a student accounting system, and conduct a follow-up study of students who dropped out during the 1981-82 school year. In the second year, it will develop model programs for grades K-8, conduct in-service training for teachers and provide a clearinghouse with techniques for school districts to use in developing comprehensive plans.

During the second year, local school districts will also begin developing plans for dropout prevention programs. During the third year, school districts would begin implementing these plans.

Summary

In summary, the issue of dropout prevention and recovery has clearly captured the attention of policymakers in many states. Moreover, given the magnitude of the problem, we can anticipate that other states which have been relatively inactive on the issue are likely to face increasing pressure to take action to address the problem in the near future. In the next section of the paper we review the strategies that states can use to finance their dropout prevention initiatives.